

Britney Fratus-White

Professor Warner

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## Deepening the Understanding of Popular Genres:

### The Supernatural

The genre of supernatural fiction is often overlooked as a viable means for educating students. Some educators will even tell you that the genre is of modern creation and contains no true value in the classroom. However, this is untrue. The supernatural is represented in a few of our canonical works. Furthermore as a genre of American Literature, which is gaining quite a bit of popularity with our young adult readers, it deserves to be studied and analyzed like all other popular genres.

The canonical work that I have chosen to represent the genre is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley is attributed to creating the science fiction and supernatural genres. *Frankenstein* was written in 1818 when Shelley was just 18 years old. The story of a young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, and his creation of a sentient being joined the canon of literature with just fewer than three hundred pages. Shelley's *Frankenstein* would be the kick-starter in a unit of study.

Students would learn about the progression of the genre starting with Mary Shelley's work and moving forward into the modern era. Studying this genre would help to create avid readers. Young adults are already reading books of this popular genre today. Introducing the following works, which are listed and summarized below, to young readers will help capture more minds and educate them on the history of a genre.

This genre of writing and story telling can be used to help supplement a broader curriculum. The supernatural is an over encompassing theme that also has roots in romance, gothic, coming of age, loss of innocence and many other major themes that are already covered in English Curriculum. It would greatly benefit students to study the above-mentioned themes through the lens of the supernatural genre because it provides a different take and understanding that many young adults are already trying to achieve outside the classroom. Allowing students to study this genre would be bringing the popular literature back into the classroom to study and analyze.

#### Supernatural Annotated Bibliography

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##### Books:

Colfer, Eoin. *The Wish List*. New York: Miramax /Hyperion for Children, 2003. Print.

“Meg Finn is in trouble-unearthly trouble. Cast out of her home by her stepfather after her mother's death, Meg is a wanderer, a troublemaker. But after her latest stunt, finding a place to sleep is the least of her worries. Belch, her partner in crime, has gotten her involved in the attempted robbery of an elderly man, Lowrie McCall. And things go horribly wrong. After an accidental explosion, Meg's spirit is flung into limbo, and a race begins between the demonic and the divine to win her soul” (Smith 1). This story explores the topics of spirituality and friendship. This story contributes to understanding the supernatural theme by demonstrating the many themes that the genre can contain.

Frater, Rhiannon. *Midnight Spell*. S.l.: Permuted, 2013. Print.

In this modern novel the reader learns of a friendship duo, Adam and Christy. Both are juniors in high school in a small town in Texas. Adam struggles with his sexuality while Christy explores her powers in witchcraft. The climax of the story includes a love potion, heartbreak, and the dangerous evils of the magical stock. Frater includes the major themes of sexuality, friendship, coming of age, and the hero's journey. Students should study this story because it brings major issues to light in a non-confrontational way. The major theme of sexuality is discussed in a realistic light that many students who struggle with the same problems can understand.

Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis*. Ed. A. L. Lloyd. New York: Vanguard, 1946. Print.

In Kafka's novella our protagonist, Gregor Samsa, awakens one morning to find that he has been transformed into a giant beetle. This canonical book would contribute to the overall study of the supernatural genre by providing a different means in which the supernatural can be presented. All other aspects of Gregor's life remain completely untouched however something supernatural did occur. A student's analysis of this story, in context of the history of supernatural, would reveal the development of the genre into what it has established itself as today.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. New York: Arthur A. Levine, 1999. Print.

This story is about a young wizard who has been orphaned by the famed Dark Wizard, Lord Voldemort. In this, the third installment of the *Harry Potter* series, Harry embarks on a journey to discover what really happened to his parents. This novel is important to the supernatural genre because it popularized the genre among the youth and young adult readers. The popularity of the story will contribute to classroom discussions

and make classroom debates over popular themes easy. Major themes within this novel include friendship, loss of innocence, and coming of age. This book would be the part of the capstone to the supernatural genre study as it is the pinnacle of supernatural writing for young adult literature.

Saul, John. *Nathaniel*. New York: Bantam, 1984. Print.

“For a hundred years, the people of Prairie Bend have whispered Nathaniel's name in wonder and fear. Some say he is a folktale, created to frighten children on cold winter nights. Some swear he is a terrifying spirit returned to avenge the past. But soon . . . very soon . . . some will learn that Nathaniel lives still--that he is darkly, horrifyingly real” (Banish 1). This story provides a different plot development than the others listed here. While it still possesses some format of the hero's journey this story is almost immediately identifiable as a thriller or suspense novel. This story is included in order to demonstrate the multiple plot developments that the supernatural genre has developed.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maurice Hindle. *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus*. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

In this classic novel Mary Shelley tells the story of a young scientist, who created a sentient being using dead body parts. Through the course of the novel the reader learns of the monster's true intentions to be good but his inability to do so. Major themes that Mary Shelley touches on include; communication, sacrifice, and free will. This story would be wonderful for students to study not just because it is part of the classic supernatural genre but also because it touches on critical issues many students face today. The idea of insufficient communication between master and subject, or parental figures

and their offspring, is one that many menials are currently dealing with today. While this story may not solve their problems it will be a relatable topic to discuss in the classroom.

Stoker, Bram. *The New Annotated Dracula*. Ed. Leslie S. Klinger. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Print.

In this canonical story the protagonist, Jonathan Harker, travels to Transylvania in order to a Romanian Noble in buying English property. However, Harker soon learns that he is a prisoner of the nobleman and must plan a quick escape in order to warn avoid the demonic powers of the vampires (Anon 1). Students should study this story because it provides an expanse on the understanding of the supernatural genre. Between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* students can identify the strides and development the supernatural genre has made.

Short Stories:

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1971. Print.

In Edgar Allen Poe's short story the reader meets a disturbed man who suffers from unknown causes. The unnamed narrator experiences strange happenings in the house including the citing of ghosts and other paranormal activity. This story provides demonstrates that the supernatural genre crosses all forms of literature.

Movies:

*Twilight*. Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Perf. Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson. Sony, 2009. DVD.

This movie adaptation of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* holds true to the plot and character development that the book set forth. Bella Swan falls in love with a boy named

Edward Cullen. It is only after the fact that she finds herself in a world full of what she once thought was mystical creatures. Her world now consumed by vampires she must run to save herself and the people she loves from the evil truly evil ones. This movie should be watched in order to supplement the reading. It is a visual adaptation of the book.

While I agree it is not the best representation as far as literature to film goes it does provide a deeper understanding of the supernatural genre. After reading Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Stephanie Meyer's vampires convey a far less sinister look into what the supernatural world holds.

*Casper*. Dir. Bradley Silberling. Perf. Bill Pullman. 1995. Videocassette.

This children's film tells the story of a girl and her paranormal expert father. They buy a house that is supposedly haunted by four ghosts one of which is friendly. This family friendly movie should be shown in conjunction with the rest of this list in order to demonstrate the versatility of the genre and the many age groups it can relate too. While the supernatural is massively popular with young adults all age groups can enjoy today it.

#### Works Cited

Anon, Anon. "Dracula Summary." *Dracula Summary*. Grade Savor, n.d. Web. 04 May 2015.

Banish, S. "Nathaniel." *Goodreads*. Goodreads, n.d. Web. 04 May 2015.

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